

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Office of Law Enforcement
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For Information
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wildlife Inspector



Wildlife inspectors of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are the Nation's front-line defense against the illegal wildlife trade — a criminal enterprise that threatens species worldwide. These professional import-export control officers ensure that wildlife shipments comply with U.S. and international wildlife protection laws.

Stationed at the Nation's major international airports, ocean ports, and border crossings, wildlife inspectors monitor an annual trade worth more than \$2 billion. They stop illegal shipments, intercept smuggled wildlife and wildlife products, and help the United States fulfill its commitment to global wildlife conservation.

Where do inspectors work?

By law, most commercial wildlife shipments come through 18 “designated ports”— Anchorage, Alaska; Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas; Honolulu, Hawaii; Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, California; Louisville, Kentucky; Memphis, Tennessee; Miami, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York, New York; Newark, New Jersey; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; and Seattle, Washington. The Service operates wildlife inspection offices in these cities. Inspectors also staff locations along the Mexican and Canadian borders and several additional ports that handle specific types of wildlife traffic.

What do inspectors do?

The United States is one of the world’s largest markets for wildlife and wildlife products. High-volume “live” traffic includes exotic reptiles, tropical fish, and primates. Manufactured products (such as boots, shoes, purses, jewelry, caviar, and meats) and less “processed” wildlife items (such as hunting trophies, feathers, furs, skins, raw coral, and shells) are also common.

Wildlife inspectors must understand and enforce a range of U.S. and international laws, regulations, and treaties that protect wildlife and limit commercial trade in endangered animals and plants. They must be able to identify thousands of different species, both live and



Species identification is an important part of inspectors' work. (USFWS/ Frank Kohn)

as parts or products. Inspectors clear legal imports and exports and stop shipments that violate the law. They make sure that wildlife imports and exports are accompanied by the required permits and licenses and verify that the contents of shipments match the items listed on declaration forms. They pay special attention to live wildlife, checking to see that animals in transit are treated humanely.

Although inspectors spend most of their time processing commercial cargo shipments, they also keep tabs on international cargo passenger traffic. Unwary travelers all too often return from abroad with illegal wildlife souvenirs. Many smuggling rings use human couriers; inspectors find protected animals hidden in clothing and stuffed in suitcases and handbags. Wildlife inspectors work closely with Service special agents and counterparts from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and other Federal agencies that police international trade. They staff special enforcement task forces that conduct inspection blitzes at international mail processing facilities and other locations or target specific enforcement problems, such as the import and sale of medicinal products made from endangered species.

Outreach is also an important part of the job. Inspectors meet with customs brokers, trade associations, international travelers, and hunters to explain wildlife import/export rules and regulations. They are popular guest speakers at schools, nature centers, community conservation programs, and environmental fairs.



(Above) Wildlife inspector seizes coral shipment for violations of U.S. wildlife laws. (USFWS) (Right) Inspectors suit up in protective gear before checking shipments. (USFWS)



How do I become a wildlife inspector?

Wildlife inspector positions are announced by the Office of Personnel Management on the USAJOBS website (www.usajobs.gov) when vacancies occur. Inspectors typically join the Service at the GS-5, 7, or 9 levels, depending on their education and experience. Knowledge of wildlife taxonomy and zoology is especially helpful. A background in criminal justice, communication skills, and computer literacy are also useful.

Are there any special requirements?

Wildlife inspectors work in airport cargo facilities, passenger terminals, dock warehouses, and border check stations. They must be comfortable handling live animals and fit enough to lift heavy cartons and cases. Wildlife inspectors wear uniforms while on duty. Some inspections require protective clothing and special safety equipment. Because international trade is an around-the-clock business, inspectors sometimes work on weekends or at night. They must have a valid State driver's license and be able to operate a government-owned car, van, or pickup truck.



(Above) Inspectors examine shipments of live reptiles. (USFWS) (Above Left) and dried frogs. (USFWS/Bill Butcher) (Left) Outreach programs teach the public about wildlife trade laws. (USFWS/Bill Butcher)

(opposite page) Inspectors check passenger baggage coming off an arriving international flight. (USFWS)



What opportunities exist for training and career advancement?

All new wildlife inspectors complete an eight-week basic training program at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia, and receive on-the-job instruction and guidance. "In service" training programs give seasoned inspectors a chance to enhance job skills and review regulatory and procedural changes.

Career ladders for wildlife inspectors in the field reach the GS-11 level; GS-12 supervisory positions are available at some ports. Law enforcement headquarters staff includes GS-12 and 13 senior wildlife inspectors who advise Service management on wildlife inspection policies and issues. Wildlife inspectors have opportunities to work on special enforcement task forces and complete short-term assignments in the headquarters office.

What benefits do inspectors earn?

Wildlife inspectors participate in the Federal Employees Retirement System. Wildlife inspectors earn 13 to 26 days of annual leave each year depending on how long they have been employed. Benefits also include 13 days of paid sick leave per year; 10 paid Federal holidays; basic life insurance and low-cost options for additional coverage; a free yearly physical examination; and opportunities to participate in a variety of reasonably priced health insurance plans and to purchase low-cost dental, vision, and long-term care insurance.